

# “HISTORIC BRETHRENISM”

## AN EXCEEDINGLY INTERESTING DOCUMENT, REVEALING ITS MEANING

(NOTE: Dr. Alva J. McClain has loaned the editor a very interesting and valuable document that came into his hands through some aged sister in California. This is "The Brethren's Almanac for The United States, for the Year of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, 1871, published by H. R. Holsinger, Tyrone, Penna."

In this old Almanac, under the title, "REMARKS UPON COURTS," there is reprinted a translation "FROM THE 'HIGH GERMAN AMERICAN ALMANAC' FOR THE YEAR 1760, PUBLISHED BY CHRISTOPHER SAUR, AND WAS WRITTEN BY HIM AS A PREFACE TO THE LIST OF COURTS TO BE HELD IN THE DIFFERENT 'STATES AND TERRITORIES'."

Certainly, if there is any such thing as historic Brethrenism, we here possess some of it; for who can deny that the voice of Christopher Saur, the printer of the first Bible that was ever printed in America, and one of the most famous worthies of the Brethren movement from its very beginning, is any other than one of the most authoritative voices within the realm of "historic Brethrenism"?

These "REMARKS UPON COURTS" ought to be read with exceeding great interest. PROFESSING TO BE "historic Brethren," and TRULY POSSESSING the spirit of "historic Brethrenism" that enables one to be strong enough and big enough and spiritual enough to live according to its teachings when temporal possessions are at stake, seem to be two different things.

Anyhow, if anyone wants to know the position of the fathers who made Brethrenism historic, this document certainly reveals it; and in these momentous days we quote the same in full, and pray that it may help all Brethren to live up to their professions and to be truly Brethren.—L.S.B.)

### REMARKS UPON COURTS

Inasmuch as through the fall of man everything became so desperately corrupt, that men will no longer be governed by the Spirit of God, (which is a spirit of love and peace,) but are continually bent upon defrauding and deceiving one another, exercising injustice, withholding just dues, and even destroying one another's lives, as it is daily witnessed, therefore, God, in the wisdom of his counsel, thought it good to appoint governments, and into their hands has delivered the sword for the punishment of the evil doer, and the protection of the good. See Rom. 13. And where a government answers these designs of God, there it is right for believers to be subject to such government as the apostle commands in the same chapter. The token by which such a government may be known, to which such obedience is due, is also set forth by the apostle in the 3d verse of the 13th chapter: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the powers? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." Now where a government is thus administered, so that the pious receive its protection and praise, which never transcends the limits of the Divine law, nor attempts to exercise authority over the consciences or religious views of its subjects, unless acts deserving of punishment should be committed, ever seeking to maintain peace and union; bearing the sword, but compelling no one to use it against his conscience; he that resisteth such a government, "resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

Should, however, a government not be constituted according to God's ordinance, hating and envying the just, praising and protecting the evil, exercising authority over the consciences of men, imposing on them unchristian deeds, and the carnal sword, (which Christ has commanded to be put into the sheath,) to be subject to such a government, would be nothing else than rejecting the master and obeying the servant; to such Peter and John replied without a violation of conscience, (Acts 4:19): "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."

According to the original text of Hebrews 11:3, it reads: "Through faith we know that the things which we see, became of the things which we do not see." Hence all visible things, whether good or evil, are an offspring, or antitype from the powers of light or darkness, and are swayed by them. So also governments established according to divine appointment, together with their ministrations, are typical of the judicature of Christ and his saints at that great day when all shall be judged in righteousness, at which great court, or judgment day, shall appear, not only all men, as Paul says; (2 Cor. 5:10;) but even angels themselves shall be judged (I Cor. 6:3).

And as Christ the true Head of all believers humbled himself before He ascended, suffered before He reigns, was condemned and put to death before He comes to judge; did not appeal to secular powers for protection or redress when upbraided as Beelzebub or prince of devils; "reviled not when He was reviled, and when He suffered He threatened not, but committed all unto Him who judgeth righteously;" hence the true followers of that blessed Head are commanded not to "judge before the time," gladly leaving over this ministration to its servants and allowing them to represent the figure, but they themselves the substance; and where the servants, or as they are termed in Rom. 13:4, the "ministers of God," rule well, there the children will also rejoice together.

We are therefore under obligations to thank God, that here in Pennsylvania we have such authorities that grant and protect liberty of conscience, and have on several occasions bravely defended those liberties when we were in danger of losing them, for which God will certainly be their rewarder. But that many acts of injustice and violence are perpetrated, against the advice of the authorities, not only by ungodly citizens, but by under officials, who love bribes, and pervert right, almost daily experience teaches. It would indeed be desirable that men would accept the advice of Christ and His apostles, rather to suffer than to contend at law. "And if any man will sue thee at law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Rom.

12:19. And whosoever suffereth wrong for Christ's sake, hath the promise of receiving "an hundred fold again." Matt. 19:29.

Should, however, the objector say, "My faith is too weak for these things, and for such things no one is prepared without faith; and if we do not appeal to the civil authorities and make use of the law, which is ordained of God and designed for our benefit, we are in danger of being wronged out of what is justly our own; and circumstances differ widely and cannot all be measured by the same rule," etc., then I answer: It is well spoken, for hereunto faith is demanded, for without faith these things cannot be fulfilled; but is not faith required in the performance of every Christian duty? For "That which is without faith is sin." Rom. 14:23. And the fear of suffering the loss of goods by honoring the doctrine of Christ, "and exercising himself in godliness, cannot possess him that has faith, for he knoweth that without the permission of God neither men nor the devil have power to harm him, and should God permit it he is content that His will shall be done, knowing that it will work for our good: for "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life, that now is and that which is to come." I Tim. 4:8.

As to circumstances being so diversified that all may not be squared by the same rule, I partly admit, yet no circumstance is so extraordinary that by faith we may not meet the probation of God. But this I say, and will prove it by the Scriptures, that it is a great shame for professors of Christianity, and members of the same church, to sue one another at law before the civil authorities, for they thereby plainly manifest that their teachers and superintendents, and deacons, and in fact their whole society are destitute of that wisdom which qualifies men to decide in worldly matters, as Paul says, I Cor. 6:5-7, which read carefully.

Such professors give plainly to understand that they love their temporal goods more than their undying souls, seeing they entrust their souls to such to whom they will not commit the adjusting of their temporal difficulties. Should, however, the contending parties belong to different societies or religious professions, it would be advisable that each select several men and pledge themselves together to abide by the decision of those men, and thus in a short time, and at a trifling expense, the most important contests could be disposed of. It is consistent with sound reason that neighbors, being acquainted with all the circumstances on both sides, are more competent to decide cases than strangers who have not that acquaintance, and whose judgment frequently must depend upon statements made by unprincipled tattlers, who for money will make right appear wrong, and wrong right. And then after the parties have spent more in lawing than the matter in dispute was worth, and continued the suit for years, after all it is not unfrequently settled by arbitration.

It is evident that lawyers are seldom at enmity with each other, but frequently decide cases between themselves beforehand, and if one gains a case this

time, he must allow the other to gain the next, whether right or wrong. Hence they may justly be compared to a pair of shears, the blades of which seem continually to be cutting each other, but really they cut only that which comes between them.

In Pennsylvania alone, more than ten thousand pounds might be saved annually, if men would refrain from contending at law, and have their disputes settled according to the foregoing plan. But he that is not pleased with this method, and would rather choose the way of retaliation than of amity, will find information below of the time and places set apart when and where the vindictive may impeach one another.

(Then follows a list of Courts.—Ed.)

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After quoting the above document, the editor was struck with its remarkable ending. While the "List of Courts" was not printed in the document, yet apparently the document ended in a way as much as to say: We have given you the will of God, as set forth in the Scriptures, to guide your feet when issues arise between brethren, but if any of you cannot live up to this teaching and are determined to "choose the way of retaliation" rather "than of amity," here is a "List of Courts" where you can go to satisfy the "vindictive" old man within you and proceed to "impeach one another."—L.S.B.